



# BOARD OF SUPERVISORS COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

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**MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS**  
SUPERVISOR, SECOND DISTRICT

April 2, 2010

William T Fujioka  
Chief Executive Officer  
County of Los Angeles  
500 West Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Mr. Fujioka:

Thank you for your analysis and recommendations on replacing the Family and Children's Index (FCI). You have provided a useful initial road map which I hope can lead us to a system for quickly spotting dangers to children.

Unfortunately, Los Angeles County remains behind the times when it comes to investigating child abuse. Investigators still lack rapid access to criminal records, mental health histories or even information on which adults reside in a child's home.

There is no common database that would give child abuse investigators instant information from police, prosecutors, health officials, schools and others that could provide an early warning of potential harm. This should be our goal. Your report, in response to a motion I introduced in August, shows we can build a better system. You have shown us there is a way; we must now show we have the will.

The County is held back by a system that combines aged technology with laws focused more on shielding government from liability than protecting children from abuse or neglect.

As you know, I do not believe the current "pointer" system is as useful as it should be. It "points" the user to a citation of a record, rather than providing access to the record itself. Instead of telling an investigator, for instance, if a parent has been convicted of assault and providing some information on the crime, FCI will indicate only that there is a file at the District Attorney or Sheriff, and will provide a contact name at the department.

Rather than provide immediate case information, it essentially directs an investigator to call someone to set up a meeting. This assumes the person can be reached or is still employed. This method is too cumbersome to be effective.

Your report notes that In California, the state's Welfare and Institutions Code does not allow the kinds of more complete systems used in other states; it limits us to a "pointer" system. This is patently unacceptable.

I understand we must protect privacy rights of individuals whose records may be accessed by a system. But we must balance those privacy protections against the "life or death" threats to children that we know are, tragically, too prevalent in Los Angeles County.

When children are at substantial risk, we must not cling to a dysfunctional defense of confidentiality. We can instead act nimbly to give investigators the warning signs they need to spot hazards, while maintaining protections that will also ensure access to records is not abused.

As a society we must treat the threat to children as seriously as we do the threat of terrorism. We can find ways to act both aggressively and fairly to protect the children in our custody.

Your report identifies several options for creating an information system that will allow Los Angeles investigators to get the information they need to make faster and better decisions during situations in which no one can afford to wait. The report also identifies systems in other parts of the country that could serve as models for Los Angeles County.

I look forward to working with your office, families, academic experts, and community and government allies, including state legislators, to get the laws and tools we need to protect children.

Again, I thank your office, specifically Jackie White and Kathy House and their respective teams for the work they have done. There is more work to do.

With hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mark Ridley-Thomas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a stylized "R".

**MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS**  
Supervisor, Second District